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Educator

Your consumer education connection

Volume 10, No. 1, 2005

■ New Tools

This issue of *The Food Safety Educator* is dedicated to electronic services and other items FSIS rolled out in 2004. Featured are "Ask Karen" (page 2) and a new FSIS Web site (page 4).

In the center, you'll also find a

pull-out section that reports on the activities of the USDA Food Safety Mobile last year.

You can read about changes in *The Food Safety Educator*, including our staff, Web page, and content. As always, we welcome your input. ●

Food Safety Mobile Recap



The center spread of this issue is a report of 2004 Food Safety Mobile activities. The Mobile participated in the Albuquerque, NM, International Balloon Fiesta in October 2004.

Best Wishes, Dianne

As *The Food Safety Educator* goes into its 10th year of bringing you news and information, we are saying "Good-bye and best wishes" to its editor, Dianne Durant, as she retires from the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Dianne worked on the newsletter since its launch in 1996, bringing it to more than 12,000 subscribers in 2004. She has covered topics from the unveiling of the "Safe Handling Instructions" label to irradiation of ground beef, use of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) for Federal inspections and consumer training, conferences, Internet resources, social marketing, and the creation of Fight BAC!® and Thermy™.

The Food Safety Education Staff wishes Dianne the best of luck and much enjoyment in her retirement.

We'll miss you! ●

■ A Food Safety Educator Is “Born”

By Tangela Allen and Laura Reiser

As Athena sprang forth from the head of Zeus fully grown and in full armor, ready for victory, and full of wisdom, on April 20, 2004, “Ask Karen” was launched onto the Food Safety and Inspection Service’s (FSIS) Web site, ready to overcome foodborne illness by answering the public’s food safety questions.

As a virtual representative (vRep), the “Ask Karen” tool sprang forth from many heads—technical information specialists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Meat and Poultry Hotline, public affairs specialists, and Web developers. They provided the vRep “wisdom” by populating its database with answers to anticipated questions. The team armed the vRep with speed and flexibility by giving it an interactive ability such that users can type in a food safety question and get an almost instantaneous answer or referral. By using the Web as its venue, the vRep team made “Ask Karen” available to users anytime, anywhere. When users go to the FSIS home page (www.fsis.usda.gov) and click on the link “Ask a Food Safety Question,” they meet “Ask Karen.”

Virtual and “Personal”

A vRep is an automated information source designed to display answers to questions which consumers can ask about a set of topics. The topics for “Ask Karen” are food safety, food inspection, food storage and preparation, food recalls, and other topics related to meat, poultry, and egg products. The responses given by “Karen” contain specific answers to questions along with optional Web sites and links that will answer each question in detail.

The automated response system provides streamlined information and data that make getting questions

I Want To...

- [Ask a Food Safety Question](#)
- Local
- Find Info
- Sub
- Visit Safe
- Wat Ann
- Atte
- Exp Poul
- View

Food Safety Education

Ask Karen



I'm Karen, the FSIS Virtual Representative. I can answer your food safety questions.

I am trained to answer questions about the prevention of foodborne illness, as well as the safe storage, preparation, and handling of meat, poultry and egg products.

Please type your question below.

How can I keep leftovers safe?

Ask Help

When visitors to the FSIS home page click on “Ask a Food Safety Question,” they go directly to the “Ask Karen” page, where they can enter their food safety questions.

answered easier for consumers. This differs from a search engine, which returns every reference to the topic available on the FSIS Web site. With “Ask Karen,” consumers receive their responses from a database, which contains safe food-handling procedures for consumers and consumer food safety education information.

The vRep is designed to enhance the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline by providing consumers 24/7 access to more than 20 years of safe food-handling knowledge assembled by the Hotline staff. With “Ask Karen,” consumers just type in a question at their convenience. It doesn’t matter if it’s 2:00 in the afternoon or 2:00 in the morning.

Once a consumer types a question into the designated box on the “Ask Karen” Web page, the tool returns

a response from the database. Responses may also include a link where the consumer can find more information.

If the user isn’t sure of the question or just wants to explore the “wisdom” of “Ask Karen,” there is another option. The “Help” button leads the consumer to “Question Categories.” The consumer can type one of these categories in the question box, then the vRep will display the current list of example questions in the category.

Learn Something New Every Day

If “Karen” doesn’t understand the question, the vRep offers suggestions of alternative questions or refers the consumer to the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline. The tool works best with simply stated questions; long explanations are not needed for the

tool to retrieve an answer.

The vRep “learns” to answer new questions or provide better answers based on the questions asked and terms used by visitors. The system records each question and response that is given. Reports of this data are monitored and analyzed by vRep team members on a daily basis. After careful analysis, the questions that are answered incorrectly or that may pertain to other government agencies are assigned the correct response. In most cases, the consumers’ variations on questions are simply added into the tool. Unfamiliar or new terms are programmed into the vRep’s

pattern lists or synonyms to allow the database to search for the correct response.

The timeframe to put together an answer can vary from a few minutes to a few days. While 85 to 90 percent of the answers can be found within FSIS factsheets and other FSIS publications, there are questions that must be referred to other FSIS divisions to determine and develop the correct response. All responses that are entered into the database must meet FSIS requirements and guidelines from a scientific point of view. This is to ensure that consumers are getting the most up-to-date

information for the proper handling and storage of meat, poultry, and egg products.

The vRep team of seven food safety specialists and public affairs specialists began its work in January 2004, compiling information and data collected from more than 20 years of research, knowledge, and training from the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline. By the end of 2004, “Ask Karen” contained more than 1,200 main questions and more than 5,500 variations on these questions. The database contained 121 categories relating to meat, poultry, and egg products safe handling, food storage, food preparation, food inspection, food recalls, and many other topics. The tool’s accuracy is very high—higher than the developers expected to achieve in less than a year.

Food Safety Education

Ask Karen



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I am trained to answer questions about the prevention of foodborne illness, as well as the safe storage, preparation, and handling of meat, poultry and egg products.

Please type your question below.

How can I keep leftovers safe?

Ask

Help

Bacteria begin to multiply rapidly in the danger zone between 40 °F (recommended refrigerator temperature) and 140 °F. Therefore, food left out at room temperature will become unsafe in a matter of hours. Refrigerate leftovers at 40 °F or below or freeze (0 °F) as soon as possible, but never leave food out more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if the outside temperature is above 90 °F. Divide leftovers into shallow containers. This encourages rapid, even cooling. Cover with airtight lids or enclose in plastic wraps or aluminum foil. Use refrigerated leftovers within 3 to 4 days, or freeze them for longer storage. For more information, select “Help” above or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854).

A Model Educator

Although still a toddler on the Internet, “Ask Karen” has already answered thousands of questions. In just the first year, more than 14,000 visitors asked 44,000 questions.

“Ask Karen” was listed as one the Government’s “Best Practices” on the new “Federal Web Content Managers Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Managing U.S. Federal Public Websites” (www.webcontent.gov/req2d4.shtml). Through this and other venues, “Ask Karen” is used by other government agencies as a model of how to assist the public with finding answers to questions and to help identify with the needs of the public.

In the future, the system may be broadened to contain information from all of the FSIS divisions to assist educators, food service workers, and other visitors to the FSIS Web site who need more technical food safety information.

Ready to test “Karen’s” knowledge? Go directly to “Ask Karen” at www.fsis.usda.gov/food_safety_education/ask_karen/ •

After visitors type in their questions and click “Ask,” the tool returns an answer and information on how to find out more.

FSIS Puts on a New Face in Cyberspace

By Jason Waggoner

On April 20, 2004, FSIS launched its new Web site, featuring consistent navigation across the entire site. It is much easier for users to work their way through desired content and more easily retrace their steps. Internet users visit the site because they want food safety information. Usage statistics show that more than half of visitors do not enter the Web site through the “front door,” so they require a site that enables them to quickly find desired content from any page. Visitors to the FSIS Web site will notice that the Agency gave the site a fresh new design that greatly improves navigation and usability, allowing the user to more easily get to the main content areas.

“As a public health agency, it is our goal to empower consumers with knowledge as we continue to drive down the incidence of foodborne illness in America,” said FSIS Acting Administrator Dr. Barbara Masters. “This Web site gives consumers immediate access to the information that will help them protect themselves and their families.”

Consumers definitely go to the Web for information from the government. Approximately 58 percent of American Internet users, or 68 million adults, have visited at least one government Web site, and most have visited more than one, according to PewInternet.org (January 2002). Internet usage in the United States continues to rise, meaning that the general public increasingly turns to online resources.

The new design also makes Spanish language navigation on the site easier. In one click, visitors can get from the home page to a dedicated area with information in Spanish by using the “En Español” button. Studies show the average Hispanic computer user spends more than half of his or her online time with Spanish language

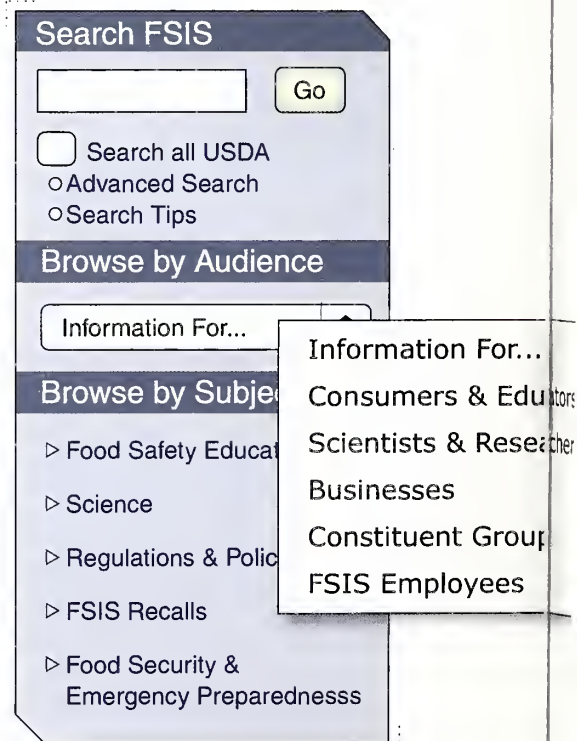


The new FSIS home page features three ways to get information: by subject, by audience, or by the action users want to perform.

resources. To meet that need, FSIS added more informational materials in Spanish.

FSIS gives all its users three new ways to find information: by activity, by audience, and by subject. The “I Want To ...” navigation area on the right side of the main pages allows the user to access the most popular Web actions and tasks in a single click. For example, this area includes the “Visit the USDA Food Safety Mobile” option. This link takes the viewer to the main Mobile page, where the user can see a video on the Mobile, get background information, look at the schedule, and request a Mobile visit in the user’s State.

With the “Browse by Subject” option, users can find the areas that most interest them with a single click.



This left-hand navigation area lists information by five major subject groupings, including “Food Safety Education,” “Science,” and “FSIS Recalls.”

With the “Browse by Audience” option, users can find information assembled and organized specifically for them by clicking on the drop-down box and selecting the appropriate designation. The site then takes the user to a main page containing specific information geared toward a particular audience. These audiences include “Consumers & Educators,” “Businesses,” and “Scientists & Researchers.”

In the area of food safety education, both the “Consumers and Educators” (by audience) and the “Food Safety Education” pages (by subject) give the user a variety of options to explore.

In addition to navigation changes, FSIS’s Web staff will regularly update the front page of the new site to reflect current news, Agency initiatives, and seasonal features to give it a continuously fresh look.


Statistics show the site redesign has been well received. As of March 2005, the number of people visiting the site had increased by more than 250 percent since the launch. Overall customer satisfaction and the number of people recommending the site have

also increased significantly, according to the FSIS online customer satisfaction survey.

The FSIS site redesign was part of an aggressive program to enhance USDA’s electronic government capabilities as part of the President’s Management Agenda. The USDA Web Presence initiative began with a new design of USDA’s home page in January 2004 as a first step to upgrade its services and be more responsive to customers’ needs. FSIS is the first USDA agency to redesign its Web site under the new Departmental standards.

Watch for a Google-powered search engine on the site in 2005. •

I Want To...

- Ask a Food Safety Question
- Locate an FSIS Office
- Find FSIS Employee Information
- Subscribe to Newsletters
- Visit the USDA Food Safety Mobile 
- Watch a Public Announcement
- Attend a Public Meeting
- Export or Import Poultry or Eggs
- View Archive

You are here: Home / Food Safety Education / Food Safety Education Programs / Food Safety Mobile



While visiting the USDA Food Safety Mobile page, users can find out how to become a host and watch a video. Visitors can easily navigate to other pages with the right-hand menu options. If the visitor entered the FSIS Web site here, the “breadcrumb trail” at the top provides a quick way to identify this page’s location.

New Materials

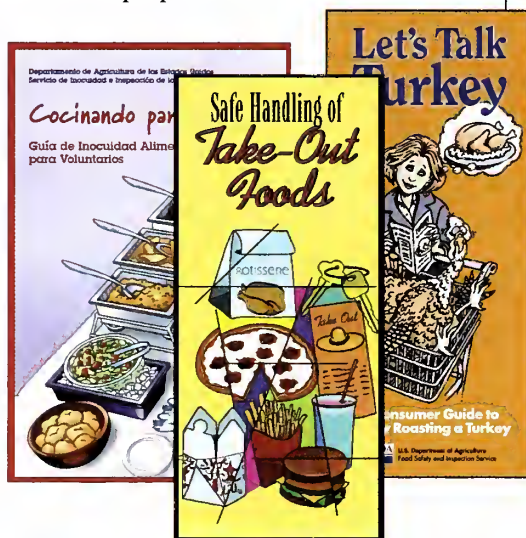
In late 2003 and throughout 2004, FSIS issued some traditional materials you can use and, of course, they are available on the FSIS Web site.

- *Conference Proceedings, Thinking Globally—Working Locally: A Conference on Food Safety Education*
- “Food Safety and Food Security: What Consumers Need to Know”
- Food safety facts with visual cultural motifs to attract the attention of Native Americans and African-Americans
- “Let’s Talk Turkey” all-in-one brochure that answers the most common questions about preparing and handling turkey
- “Protect Your Baby and Yourself From Listeriosis” plain-language factsheet in English and Spanish
- “Safe Handling of Take-Out Foods”
- *Talking About Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages* by the

National Disaster Education Coalition, of which FSIS is a member. The guide is designed to assist those who provide disaster safety information to the general public.

Translated into Spanish

- “Cooking for Groups” color booklet especially for volunteer food preparers. •



More Changes on the Web

Get the Scoop on Updates

Get the most current information from the FSIS Web site by signing up for E-mail updates. Customers may sign up for 21 initial subscription options across 8 categories to find out when pages have been revised.

Options range from recalls to export information to FSIS issuances such as regulations, directives, and notices. News releases and *The Food Safety Educator* are also available. FSIS will send you an E-mail when the pages you chose are updated.

From September 2004 to April 2005, more than 11,000 visitors to the site subscribed to the service, which averages 50 new subscribers each day. Sign up on the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/Email_Subscription/ •



Web Address Changes

The Food Safety Educator Web page address has changed. Be sure to update your bookmarks.

The Food Safety Educator

http://www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/food_safety_educator/ •

USDA Food Safety Mobile 2004 U.S. Tour



The USDA Food Safety Mobile was busy again in 2004, bringing food safety education to consumers at 100 events in 76 cities. The Mobile, operated by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), reached 48 States and the District of Columbia by the end of this, its second, annual U.S. tour.

Since March 2003, the USDA Food Safety Mobile has been finding consumers where they already go—fairs, festivals, schools, senior centers, grocery stores, parades, and more. FSIS and its partners take food safety information, materials, and experts directly to consumers without waiting for them to come looking and asking for them. These are often people who would normally not reach out themselves for information on

safe food handling, but are eager to keep themselves and their families safe.

Covered with colorful graphics featuring the notorious BAC!—the foodborne bacteria that can make people sick—the Mobile is a traveling educational tool in and of itself. Among the U.S. landmarks depicted on the Mobile's exterior lurk these

bacteria characters, stirring up trouble with food. The four steps to keeping food safe—Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill—are displayed as characters like Thermo™.

FSIS manages the Mobile and local educators host events. FSIS and local educators staff events and answer consumers' questions. The Mobile is stocked with materials consumers can take home as reminders and totes food-safety fun. The costumed-



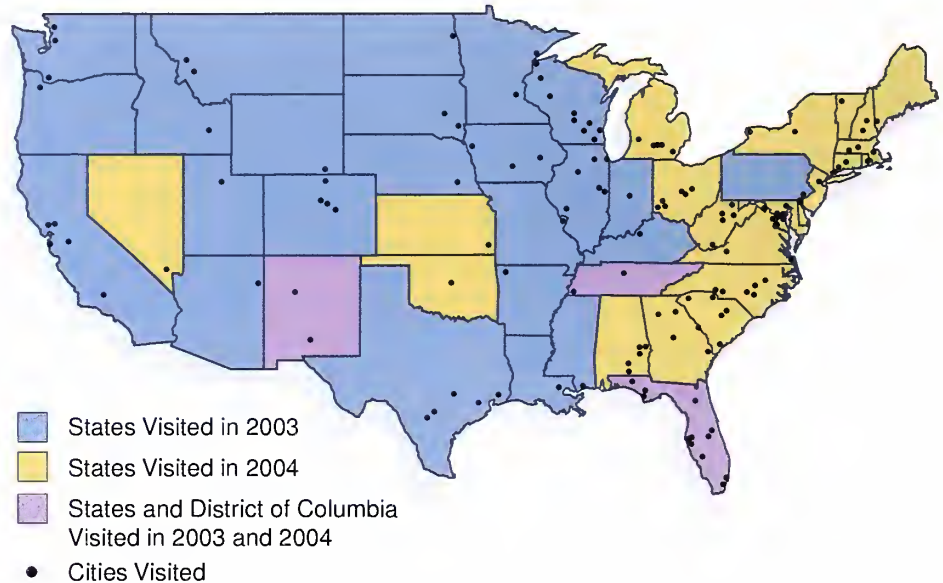
Public Health Education on the Move

characters Thermy™ and BAC! tour with the Mobile. The food safety wheel game attracts adults and children alike, beckoning them to spin the wheel, answer a question, and win a prize. Everyone walks away with a free promotional piece such as a magnet, sticker, temporary tattoo, refrigerator thermometer, or sometimes even a food thermometer. Interacting with consumers is the key to establishing a lasting impression—and affecting consumer behavior.

In 2004, the Food Safety Mobile traveled 21,000 miles, taking safe food-handling messages to communities across the Nation. Events this year included:

- Three Kings Day Parade in Miami, FL;
- Atlanta, GA, Community Food Bank Walk for Hunger;
- Mercer County, WV, Kiddie Fair;
- Taste of Cincinnati, OH;
- National Capital BBQ Battle in Washington, DC;
- Great Lakes Folk Festival in Lansing, MI;

2003–2004 USDA Food Safety Mobile Visits



- Hopkinton, NH, State Fair;
- Albuquerque, NM, International Balloon Fiesta;
- AARP convention in Las Vegas, NV; and
- Thanksgiving Parade in Baltimore, MD.

A primary goal of the USDA Food Safety Mobile is to establish and develop partnerships with various local educators and others interested in food safety in their communities. USDA and FSIS have a long history with many organizations interested in food safety. The value added by these new and growing partnerships is enormous. The Mobile would not be successful without them.

By December 2004, FSIS had more than 1,100 Food Safety Mobile partners in its database. These partners come from a variety of organizations:

- Universities and cooperative extension;
- State and local public health, agriculture, and other government agencies; and
- Grocery stores, schools; and many others.

FSIS also partnered with several universities to start an internship program. Undergraduate and



One Community at a Time to Reach Millions

graduate students worked at events on the road and at headquarters assisting with logistics. Most interns received college credit or community service hours for their degree or an accreditation. All gained valuable experience in public health education.

By using innovative approaches to reach consumers, FSIS puts itself in a unique position: using marketing innovations to reach audiences never before reached and “selling” behaviors beneficial to public health. With this approach, FSIS has provided to the public more than 800,000 face-to-face experiences with food safety messages.

Along with the experiential marketing benefits, the Mobile also contributes to educating consumers through the basic food safety messages it displays and the widespread local media attention it garners. This local media attention has resulted in safe food-handling messages reaching millions of consumers. FSIS estimates that in the Mobile’s first 2 years, it garnered more than 99 million media impressions.

In 2004, FSIS commissioned focus group research to attain a better understanding of how the Mobile program affected consumers and how



it could be enhanced. Researchers interviewed 61 participants who had visited the Mobile in 2004. Most participants said their visit to the Mobile increased or reinforced their awareness of safe food-handling practices. Surveys of the participants before and after visits showed that more participants reported an increase in their awareness or practice of safe food-handling if they received a useful promotional item, such as a T-stick, refrigerator thermometer, or magnet listing the proper internal temperatures.

Participants also reported that the most useful sources of information at the Mobile were the FSIS and local educators with whom they personally spoke about their concerns or questions. The educational service to the community by the Mobile program and local educators was also appreciated by participants.

Another favorite of the participants and their children was the food safety wheel game. They said they liked that it was interactive, engaging, and educational. It left them “hungry” for more! •

Food Safety Mobile Statistics

	2003	2004	Total
States (including DC)	28	25	49
Cities	64	76	136
Events	87	100	187
Miles Traveled	23,833	21,142	44,975
Estimated Face-to-Face Contacts	179,000	658,001	873,001
Materials Distributed	278,132	387,054	665,186
Potential Media Impressions	64,439,050	35,207,054	99,646,357

So Who Gets to Drive this Thing?

On the Road With Tim Leonard and the USDA Food Safety Mobile

By Dianne Durant

“24/7.” You hear it so much, it starts to lose meaning—but not for Tim Leonard. He’s been on the road with the USDA Food Safety Mobile, taking it and its messages about safe food handling to communities across America.

Leonard and the Mobile have covered nearly 45,000 miles and traveled to events in each of the contiguous 48 States and the District of Columbia. Leonard is driver, valet, coordinator, foreman, inventory manager, custodian, superintendent, maintenance, host, public relations representative, educator, and tour guide.

It was by chance that Leonard became the face of USDA on the road. But when you understand the roads that led Leonard to this job, you also begin to understand why he is so very good at what he does.

Leonard was raised on a poultry farm in southern California, 1 of 10 children. After community college, he headed for India with the Peace Corps. By the time he returned, Leonard was so immersed in the country, he was dreaming in the language. And, the Peace Corps project—teaching and promoting egg production—was so successful that India became a leading producer of eggs.

Back in the States, his path took him back to college—and part-time work as a meat inspector. That, in turn, led to a 35-year career with the Federal Government. For many of those years, Leonard managed personnel offices for FSIS.

But even during this career, there was a passion for the road. Enter the Harley. Leonard’s Harley-Davidson motorcycle, he’ll admit, is one of the things he truly misses when he’s traveling.



Mobile driver Tim Leonard prepares to host the food safety wheel game at a State fair.

Leonard didn’t seek to become an on-the-road guide to food safety. He had been retired several years when a colleague mentioned the new project. “I decided to go for it,” he says. And within 3 weeks, Leonard launched a new life, traveling America and helping teach food safety.

“I think it’s really made a difference,” Leonard says. People are always enthusiastic about the Mobile and support the educational effort. “Fully 90 percent of the people—and I’m talking about thousands of people—will say: ‘This is the Department of Agriculture, right? Our taxes are paying for this, right?’ I’ll say, ‘They sure do.’ And people respond, ‘Well, I agree with this. This is a great idea. Food safety is important.’”

Wherever they go, Leonard and the Mobile are emissaries. “You drive down the road and people wave at you and smile, constantly. Almost

every place you stop—filling up at a gas station, getting some food, pulling into a motel—people will come up to you and start talking. ‘What do you do? How long have you been on the road? How many places have you been?’ It’s exciting to be able to meet all these people.”

On one occasion, motoring in a parade through the Navajo Nation Fair, the crowd catching sight of the Mobile even sent up a chant: U-S-D-A! U-S-D-A!

“We are very, very well received and it makes me feel like we’re making a contribution to these communities,” Leonard says.

But there is more to the Mobile than educating consumers, Leonard notes. “When you are out there on the road, you see the impact of the partnerships we make at these events. It’s just incredible. USDA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, public health, and extension—we’re working together. We help them realize we are all on the same team. With the Mobile, we bring resources they just can’t produce. And they bring local contacts; getting word to people we could never reach. It really works.

“But the other interesting thing is that we are a catalyst. We bring people together who’ve never worked together before. And now they are. Long after we are gone, this is something that remains,” Leonard says.

So, after all these miles, do those days on the road all become a daze?

“When I left with the Mobile for the first time, it was April 1, 2003. And when I came back after that first tour, it was exactly December 1. And, in my mind, I still had a clear picture of every event that took place. That’s how memorable it was.” •

Editorial Notes

Dear Educator,

I'm very pleased to be the new editor of *The Food Safety Educator*. The tagline for the Educator has always been, "Your consumer education connection." Our goal is to make that the focus of the publication. Other publications and news sources such as the e-newsletter "EdNet" will continue to cover news about food safety science and education for industry and food service.

Features and topics planned for the *Educator* include:

- List of new publications, materials, curricula, and other educational tools for consumers and consumer educators from USDA and its partners;
- Tips on using the media to educate consumers;
- News on social marketing efforts and developments;
- News on conferences and training;
- Articles from your peers about their successes in grass-roots education and behavior change (send us your ideas);
- Information on how to leverage partnerships to enhance your programs; and
- New technologies and methodologies you can use in consumer education and behavior change.

Do you think something is missing from this list? Do you have a success story or a valuable experience to share with others interested in educating consumers about food safety? Please send your ideas and comments to me at fsis.outreach@usda.gov, fax to (301) 504-0204, or mail to our address on the back page. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Laura S. Reiser

Editor

How To Keep in Touch With Food Safety Education Information

The Food Safety Educator

This free newsletter reports on food safety educational programs and materials. It is distributed to more than 12,000 educators throughout the country, including public health offices, extension educators, industry, and consumer groups.

To subscribe: provide your name, organization, and mailing address.

- Write to USDA/FSIS/FSES, Mail Stop 5268, 5601 Sunnyside Ave., Beltsville, MD 20705, or

- Fax your request to (301) 504-0204, or
 - E-mail your request to fsis.outreach@usda.gov
- The newsletter is also available on the FSIS Web site: www.fsis.usda.gov/News_&_Events/food_safety_educator/

Sign up there to find out by E-mail when new editions are posted to the FSIS Web site.

More on the Web

USDA/Food Safety and Inspection Service: www.fsis.usda.gov

Thermy™ Web page: www.fsis.usda.gov/thermy/

Fight BAC!®: www.fightbac.org

Gateway to Government Food Safety Info: www.foodsafety.gov

FDA/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition: www.cfsan.fda.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/foodsafety



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Please E-mail comments and suggestions to us at fsis.outreach@usda.gov

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Other Resources

EdNet: a monthly electronic newsletter for food safety educators. To subscribe, send an E-mail message to Listserv@foodsafety.gov. Send the message: Subscribe EDNET-L firstname lastname

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline: call toll-free 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), for the hearing-impaired (TTY) 1-800-256-7072

Food and Drug Administration's Outreach and Information Center: Call toll-free 1-888-SAFEFOOD